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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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13.08.2022

CDC drops quarantine guidelines for those exposed to COVID-19

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced Thursday that it is no longer recommending that those exposed to COVID-19 quarantine in order to prevent the spread of the deadly disease. It is instead calling on those exposed to “wear a high-quality mask for 10 days and get tested on day 5.”

The CDC’s press release also reiterates its earlier reduction of isolation for those who test positive for COVID-19, stating that an infected person should only isolate for five days. It also explicitly notes that as long as “symptoms are improving” after day five, “you may end your isolation.” It only recommends isolation for 10 days for “moderate” or “severe” illness, while ignoring the fact that those with a “mild” case of the pathogen can spread it to others and that even those cases can be extremely debilitating and can lead to Long COVID.



Signs on the wall remind students to keep 6 feet apart during a media tour of the Norris Middle School in Omaha, Neb., Wednesday, July 29, 2020. The CDC has again revised its COVID guidelines, further relaxing quarantine recommendations. (AP Photo/Nati Harnik, File)

The CDC also issued no change to its definition of “fully vaccinated” as two shots of the mRNA vaccines, despite the mass of data showing that the Omicron variant and its many subvariants have severely eroded the ability of two doses to prevent hospitalization. The agency also reaffirmed that it will continue to use hospitalization rates, a lagging indicator of the spread of the virus, as the chief measure of the level of danger from the pandemic in each county.

At a press conference Thursday, CDC spokesperson Greta Massetti attempted to justify the changes by claiming that, “We’re in a stronger place today ... with more tools—like vaccination, boosters, and treatments.” She continued that the pandemic is at a point where it, “no longer severely disrupts our daily lives” and added ominously, “We know that COVID-19 is here to stay.”

In other words, according to the CDC, tens or hundreds of thousands of infections and hundreds or thousands of deaths each day from COVID-19 is to be the baseline going forward, with public health measures increasingly non-existent and mass death a daily occurrence. New variants and whole new pandemics, whether from monkeypox, polio or some other disease, are to be accepted by the population.

The agency also explicitly noted that the new regulations mean that the “test to stay” policy to check children for COVID-19 infection after exposure at schools is being dropped. There will be no attempt to stem the spread of the deadly disease in schools, despite the fact that COVID-19 has killed at least 1,736 children in the US alone, a number which is likely a significant undercount, and inflicted Long COVID on an untold number of young people.

Ignoring the mortal threat to children is, however, more or less state policy. The same day the CDC guidelines were released, Democratic Senator Bernie Sanders interviewed the Biden administration’s COVID-19 Response Coordinator Dr. Ashish Jha. One of the topics was the impact of the virus on children. During the interview, Sanders made the extraordinary claim that, “children ... are not dying” from COVID-19.

More remarkably, Dr. Jha made no effort to correct Sanders! He instead built off Sanders’ falsehood and justified the new CDC guidelines for schools, asserting, “we should look forward to a school year in which every child is in school, is in person, full-time, for the whole year. I think we have all the ability to do that, and that should be the only acceptable standard.” Dr. Jha’s enforcers will be the “teachers unions,” from whom he received “positive reviews” about the new CDC guidelines.

There is a clear aligning of forces among the capitalist state, from its nominal public health officials, leading politicians, and corporatist trade unions, to ensure that students are forced into schools so their parents can be more easily forced into factories and offices for the enrichment of the capitalist elite and their media and union toadies.

The new CDC guidelines provoked a flood of opposition among principled scientists and anti-COVID advocates on social media Thursday, with many commenting directly to the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Dr. Ellie Murray, an Assistant Professor of Epidemiology at Boston University School of Public Health, told the WSWS, “I am disappointed that they are advising fewer protections, despite the continued high case and death rates. I am even more disappointed to see them recommending less testing at the same time they roll back other precautions. With less testing we will not be able to properly assess the impact of this guidance.”

Dana Parish, a leading anti-COVID advocate, responded sharply to the CDC's announcement, telling the WSWS, "The new CDC guidance is the figurative nail in their coffin, and will be the literal nail in the coffin for countless children and adults who counted on CDC to protect them. That they're downright encouraging further spread of a deadly airborne virus that has a propensity to disseminate and persist in organs all over the body, cause strokes, heart attacks, multiple organ damage, dementia, and lead to an increased risk of sudden death, goes against the most basic principle of public health: to do no harm.

"They are again misleading the public by insinuating that vaccines and/or a less severe acute illness will protect them. But neither prevents long term damage, and that is a crucial message the public deserves to know. To be clear, an asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic infection still puts you at an unacceptably high risk for Long COVID. The initial infection is NOT the problem for most people now; the long term damage is."

Several other epidemiologists and airborne transmission experts weighed in on the reckless and anti-social character of the new guidance. Nicolas Smit, an expert on masks and respirators, commented to the WSWS, "As COVID-19 continues to spread along with monkeypox, the decision to lift guidelines is another sign that the goal of the government is no longer stopping the damage both viruses have on Americans' health or the already fragile economy—and instead to focus on winning votes for the midterms at all costs.

"During the 2020 election, President Biden said that anyone who was responsible for allowing 220,000 people to die should not be President of the United States and that it was important to role model mask wearing. Unfortunately, President Biden is now responsible for well over 600,000 deaths, yet still discourages mask use. The continued refusal to protect workers or the public from two preventable deadly and debilitating viruses means that the death toll will continue to grow."

Yaneer Bar-Yam, co-founder of the World Health Network, warned that, "The CDC continues to abandon protections that prevent disease, death and disability through Long COVID. Everyone should recognize that we have to share responsibility to take care of and protect ourselves under these conditions. Prevention continues to be the best response to both the COVID-19 and monkeypox pandemics."

Anti-COVID advocate Lazarus Long wrote, “It is ironic that it comes just as school starts. More teachers will be out sick, and children will lose even more quality education. Even if substitutes are brought in, it is likely they will be not qualified, such as college students or military personnel. These changes are not for Americans’ health, but for Biden’s political health.”

It is not merely, however, that the CDC has abdicated its role as the chief public health agency in the country. It is actively pursuing policies designed to generate private profits for a tiny minority of the American and world population as the rest are forced to live and work on an increasingly plague-ridden planet. Anti-COVID activist Theo Allen made this clear, noting that the CDC’s press release “is making explicit that the CDC implemented the Great Barrington Declaration of herd immunity.”

World Socialist 12.08.2022